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ABSTRACT

This publication outlines the process for developing policies for Australian child care and education programs--policies that are not only relevant and useful but that also reflect the parents' wishes and the programs' philosophies. Based upon principles of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), this document highlights the importance of a written philosophy and written goals and policies. The document describes how developing and using policies will add credibility and thereby lead to improved conditions, a higher profile, and a better image for the program. Part 1, "Background," provides a definition of policy and discusses who has policies and the reasons for policies. It also addresses the importance of developing a philosophy from a mission statement to guide later policy development and suggests a process for developing a mission statement and philosophy. Part 2, "Policy Creation," discusses policies imposed by governmental and other agencies; lists areas in which child care centers may need to develop policies, such as enrollment, health/safety, programming, staffing, and administration; discusses when a program should make or revise policies; and discusses how to develop policies. It also includes common questions and ideas from other centers and concludes by noting how philosophy and policy development, as part of the accreditation process, provide an opportunity to achieve the goal of reaching best practice. Two appendices detail several sample policies and philosophies. (KDFB)

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Accreditation & Beyond

The policy handbook

Developing policies in child care

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The policy handbook

Kathleen McNamara

Foreword

Thinking about what is done and why, about whether it can be done better and how, is a process which is at the heart of improved practice in child care no less than in any other field.

The Accreditation and Beyond Series supports that process in practical way.

Each of the books in the series puts ideas about good practice up against the understandings about children and their needs on which they are based. This is done deliberately. There are no recipes for good practice. There are, however, principles which can be used as a benchmark for deciding whether what is being done is good for children and the people who work with them. Many of these are drawn out in this series.

The impetus for the series was to provide practical support to services participating in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. However, it is also intended that the series be an ongoing reference for early childhood professionals and services working to provide quality care for children.

It is not meant to be a final statement on any of the areas it covers and the range and depth of the series is deliberately diverse as is the child care sector.

The policy handbook outlines the process for developing policies that are relevant and well used, which everyone in a service agrees on and which reflect the wishes of parents and the philosophy of the service. According to this book, policies make life easier in the hectic world of a child care service. They help decisions to be made quickly and professionally. They also empower staff and free-up management.

Other titles in the series are:

- Staff–Child interactions: A Vygotskian perspective;
- Babies need more than minding: Planning programs for babies and toddlers in group settings;
- The very best of care and education: Many ways to the Quality Improvement & Accreditation System;
- Surviving Accreditation: A QIAS ideas bank;
- Highlighting health: A discussion of health practices and accreditation; and
- Thought for food: A starting point on children's nutritional meals.

AECA hopes that these books will assist in making the accreditation experience rich, constructive and successful, and that the series will be an ongoing resource to services.

Tonia Godhard
President

This book has been prepared and written by Kathleen McNamara for the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA). It is a book written for children's services by staff from children's services. Following an initial meeting organised by the AECA in July 1994, staff from more than 10 centres — including directors, teachers and untrained staff — have been actively involved in its production. The contribution of ideas, examples, and editorial advice is greatly appreciated.

The initial participants were

• Laura Armesto • Margi Barnes • Cathy Burke • Pam Cahir • Sharon Grennan
• Jenny Hayes • Judy Jackson • Dot Masters • Hazel Moreton • Kathleen Smith

Thanks also to William Clark, Terri Golding-Clarke, Stephen Darcy, Toni Fay, Lloyd Fourmile, the staff and board of the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation, Anna Johnston, Kerryn Jones, Tina King, Julienne Martin, John & Mary McNamara, Kerri Mills, Irene Moran, Ruth Mules, the staff of Noogaleek Children's Centre–Berkley, and Margo Sommerlad.

Some of the policies and charts in the booklet have been adapted from an excellent draft document, *Children's Services Policy Handbook — a guide to the formation of policies*. Others have been adapted from the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney, as well as from other centres who wished to contribute but remain anonymous.

Thank you to every hectic child care worker who found the time to talk to the author.

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Introduction

How this book came about

After speaking to many children's services across Australia about the accreditation process, it became obvious to the Australian Early Childhood Association that one of the most difficult areas facing services was writing their policies. It was decided that a straightforward, practical book about policy-making was needed.

The process of developing policies which everyone agrees on — policies which reflect the wishes of parents; the philosophy and program of the service; policies which are referred to, adhered to, well-used, and relevant — can seem like a daunting task, particularly when there never seems to be time to actually do it.

We hope this book can help to take away some of the mystique that surrounds policy-making.

Policy writing & the accreditation process

The accreditation process highlights the importance of each children's service having a written philosophy and written goals and policies. Many principles refer directly to this:

Principle 16

The program is planned to reflect the centre's philosophy and goals.

Principle 44

The centre has written policies on hygiene, medical, emergency and accident procedures.

Principle 49

New staff are informed about the philosophy and goals of the centre.

Developing and writing policies should not be something we do simply because we have to for accreditation. The professionalisation of the industry and moves towards a more client-centred service demand that we formalise the way we do things. And that is all that policy writing is all about — formalising, professionalism, best practice. It's about writing down what we already do.

What is policy?

At the initial meeting where this book was conceived participants were asked this very question. It soon became obvious everyone has different ideas about what policy is, and what policy writing is all about. The responses were as follows:

- Making policy is writing down what you do, or what you believe you should be doing.
- Policies are guidelines for what we should be doing.
- Policy is prescriptive.
- Policy is like an agreed platform you operate from.
- Policies are based on the beliefs, values, and philosophies of the centre.
- Policies describe the core of what you do.
- They're a set of standards adhered to by an organisation.
- Policy is a process, a decision which gives a guideline for action.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines it in the following way:

POLICY... *a course or line of action adopted and pursued by a government, ruler, political party or the like.*

Just as different centres will have different policies, definitions can be different and correct for the person who understands them. What is important is that everyone within your centre understands the same thing so that all your decisions and procedures are carried out consistently and professionally.

Who has policies?

Political parties have written policies, and these are probably the most commonly discussed and understood by the general public. They are often the main factor which help us decide our vote. You might agree with a party's policies towards health, education, the economy, or child care. You may dislike a party because of their policies towards small business, or their lack of policies.

Most major companies have written policies, about the way they do business and the conduct of their staff. We've all heard the statement 'that's company policy'. When organisations do something 'out of character', it is often said that they are going against their own policies.

Community organisations, families, even individuals have policies. These may not necessarily be written down, but, if they are beliefs upon which decisions are based and are made consistently, then they are policies.

Policies are always changing. In fact any written policy should be treated as a draft document, meaning it is always open to a rewrite if it is not working satisfactorily. As society changes so do policies. If you were to look at written policies from child care services 60 years ago, many of them would look very different from today. Others may stay the same in essence but vary in the style in which they are written.

Unfortunately, we were unable to find any old child care policies, in any archives, but this anti-discrimination policy from the retail industry shows how things can change.

Foreigners

> *There are some assistants who for some extraordinary reason seem half ashamed to serve a coloured person. There are others standing round who think the occasion is an especially amusing one, and who make no attempt to hide their amusement. Such assistants are strangely lacking in fine feelings. These foreigners must be treated with the same respect and courtesy that we should like ourselves. They make very loyal customers, and return again and again to the Store if treated with sympathy and understanding. Furthermore they bring friends along to shop.*
> *David Jones staff handbook, 1935*

An anti-discrimination policy would be written very differently today. The tone would be different: more direct; less emotive, 'self righteous', and sarcastic. It shows how attitudes change and evolve, and so too do policies and the way they are written. It makes you wonder how the policies we are writing today will be viewed in 60 years time.

Policies are always changing... any written policy should be treated as a draft document.

Why have policies?

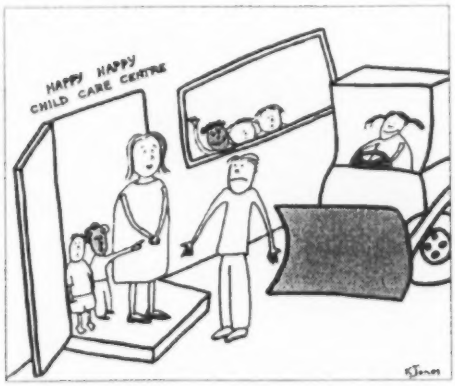
In the short term, developing and using policies will make our jobs easier. In the long term, the whole process adds credibility to what we do, which should lead to improved conditions, a higher profile, and a better image.

There are many benefits to be gained from developing good, relevant policies and sticking to them.

Policies can help you...

Enhance your image

- Your policies reflect your service's public image as well as your philosophy and goals.
- Good policies will ensure that your philosophy and goals can be achieved.



'I'm sorry, but we have a policy... definitely no earth moving equipment to be brought to the centre.'

- Policies provide integrity to the service, improve professionalism, and enhance your credibility.
- They provide a basis for choice for parents; e.g. 'I want my child to attend a centre which has a good policy towards multiculturalism (or freedom, discipline/ behaviour management, gender equity, creativity, privacy, etc.)'.
- Policies can also help you to market and promote your service.

Make decisions easily

- Policies can help to ensure decisions are made easily and consistently.
- Policies prevent *ad-hoc* or inconsistent decisions.
- Policies can take the stress out of making hard decisions. An individual faced with a difficult choice, who bases their decision on existing centre policy, is protected. They are not really making that decision alone, they have support from a body of people who developed the policy in the first place.

Save time

- Having policies improves efficiency as decisions can be made swiftly without calling unnecessary meetings.
- They provide guidelines so you are not constantly having to 're-invent the wheel'. Decisions and procedures will become second nature.

Improve communication

- Policies ensure common understanding between staff, management, parents, committee members, and the community.
- They help to provide consistency in practice and communication.
- Developing policies together, and adapting existing policies so you all agree on them, improves team-work.
- Policies ensure that you don't send mixed messages to children, parents, and the community.

Help staff

- Policies can assist you when choosing staff.
- Policies empower staff. If all staff can make certain decisions based on policies, they won't always be asking the director of the centre what to do, and that improves confidence.
- Policies protect staff, e.g. if an emergency occurs and staff act according to well drafted polices and procedures, they will be better prepared. If the worst does occur, they won't be the only ones to be held responsible.
- Policies allow staff to work better as a team — common goals, common procedures and common understandings can only enhance staff relationships.

Philosophy & policy

Which comes first?

The QIAS handbook states that when new staff commence, they should receive a handbook which outlines the centre's beliefs and values (philosophy) and its goals and policies. That means that to write policy you have to start with a philosophy. Or if you wish, before philosophy, a mission statement.

A mission statement is one or two sentences with key words that explain what your centre is about. When writing a mission statement it is best to 'brainstorm' important words that relate to your centre.

Such words may be:

- quality
- culture
- families
- parents
- accessible
- responsive
- culturally sensitive
- needs (of children) (of families)
- long day care
- safe
- educational
- business-minded
- supportive
- spiritual

A mission statement might then be written using your key words. For example, using some of the above keywords:

Mission Statement

To provide quality, accessible, long day care in a safe, educational and supportive environment which is responsive to the needs of our children and their families.

Your philosophy follows on from your mission statement and can be defined as the beliefs and values of your centre. The Macquarie dictionary defines it in the following way:

PHILOSOPHY... a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs.

To write your philosophy you can go into more detail based on your initial key-words. Your philosophy needn't be any longer than a page and can be typed up in point form or in paragraphs, usually one for each topic.

For example:

Our philosophy

At our centre, each **child** is respected as a **unique person** with his or her own **needs, experiences, abilities** and **interests.**

We recognise that all children **learn** at **individual rates** through **play, first hand experience, modelling** and imitation.

We seek to **foster** and **extend the child's inquisitive nature** by **planning** for a **secure, happy** and **stimulating** environment offering **developmentally appropriate** experiences.

We feel that it is important to see the **child as a whole** and to **develop** all aspects of the child — **physical, emotional, social, creative, cognitive** and **language skills.**

We believe in the **rights of all children** regardless of **gender, cultural identity, family background** and **religious beliefs.**

(Thanks to Camperdown Child Care Centre for examples of their mission statement and philosophy — see page 21 for other examples of philosophies.)

Policies should sit well under the 'umbrella' of your philosophy and should work to make sure that your philosophy can be achieved. For example, it would be logical for the centre with the philosophy on page 7 to have policies relating to:

- the curriculum
- multiculturalism
- professional development of staff
- gender equity
- celebrations
- behaviour management
- the use of translators
- religious beliefs

among other things.

As you complete your philosophy and go on to write your policies, you may find that your philosophy needs to be altered slightly.

Policies should never work against your philosophy. For example, if one of the main goals in your philosophy is to cater for below-average income earners, it would be illogical to have an extremely harsh policy on the collection of late fees.

Writing your mission statement & philosophy

The chart on the next page follows a process you may like go through to develop a mission statement and philosophy.

Policies should ensure that your philosophy can be achieved.

Stage	Action
1. Involvement	Seek input from parents, staff, management, and committee members to develop your mission statement and philosophy. You can do this through questionnaires, an exercise book, direct interviews, home visits, or any other method.
2. Creating a mission statement	Brainstorm key-words that describe the essence of your service, e.g. quality, diversity, fairness. A very effective way is to create a philosophy sub-committee of three or four people. Use them to write one or two sentences that sum up what you do. If you already have a mission statement, check it is still relevant. You may choose to adapt it, or a mission statement from another centre, to suit you.
3. Write your philosophy Draft #1	Based on the key-words of your mission statement, write the 1st draft of your philosophy in point form or paragraphs.
4. Feedback	Make several copies of the first draft of your mission statement and philosophy and seek feedback from parents, subcommittee members, and all staff.
Draft #2	Collect their comments and feedback and write your second draft. Make slight changes until you are all happy.
5. Put it in print	Date your philosophy and make copies available to staff and parents.

This is just one way to write a mission statement and a philosophy, but it is not the only way. You may have one in place that just needs updating. You may have four or five good policies that will assist you to write your philosophy. Or you may know another centre with beliefs and values similar to your own whose philosophy you can adapt. (Check if there's anything you can share with them.)

Now you've laid good foundations and can move into policy writing...

Developing your own policies

Nowadays organisations realise that, rather than forcing policies and rules and regulations upon staff, the process works much better when such things are developed in a democratic way. Consultation, consensus, communication, and agreement when working with staff and parents are all the ingredients that go towards creating good workable policies that everyone agrees on and will, most importantly, put into practice.

The following section looks at policies that are imposed, policies you may need to develop and how to develop them.

Policies imposed by law

There are many external bodies you may need to take into account when developing your own policies. Some impose policies and procedures which you must follow by law.

Federal Government

- Taxes
- Funding/budgeting
- Priority of access
- Hours of operation
- Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)
- Industrial relations/awards
- National Child Care Accreditation Council (NCAC)

State Government

(can differ from State to State)

- Funding
- Licensing, staffing numbers, etc.
- Infectious diseases
- AIDS
- Health & Hygiene
- Building regulations
- Quality of service regulations
- Incorporation, Co-ops, Companies and Associations
- Number of children

Local Government

- Garbage Collection
- Maintenance
- Rates
- Parking, etc.

Acts of Parliament

Anti-discrimination, annual leave, maternity leave, long service leave, worker's compensation, occupational health & safety, enterprise bargaining.

Others

Unions, sponsors, church, landlords, banks, fire & emergency services, and health professionals.

Check with relevant organisations if any laws, rules, or regulations exist which would need to be complied with when formulating your policies. Otherwise you could be developing illegal policies and

practices. For example, if you were to develop a policy about staff contracts which included paying under-award wages, you may be breaking the law. You must ensure that everything about your policy falls within legal guidelines.

Government departments, bodies, and authorities you may need or wish to consult include:

- Department of Finance, Taxation Commission
- Department of Human Services & Health
- Your State department which deals with Community Services
- Department of Industrial Relations
- Office of the Status of Women
- Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Health Department
- Fire Commission
- Business & Consumer Affairs
- Office of State Revenue
- Your State worker's compensation authority
- Local council
- Unions

Policies you may need

Policies are about what makes sense in a particular centre. The policies you need could be very different from the needs of the service around the corner. There are five main areas you should have policies to cover:

1 Enrolment
2 Health & Safety
3 Programming/Planning
4 Staffing
5 Administration

Below we have listed possible policies you may wish to develop in these five areas. Of course you don't need *every* policy listed here, and this list is by no means exhaustive. The number and type of policies you develop depend entirely upon your needs.

Enrolment

- Procedures
- Priority of access
- Eligibility
- Waiting list policy
- Special needs children
- Custody disputes
- Registration fee
- Termination of enrolment/cancellation
- Children's arrival & departure
- Registration fee

Health & Safety

- Sun safety
- Accidents
- Immunisation
- Health policy
- First aid procedures
- Security
- Missing child
- Hygiene
- Medication
- Sick children
- Sick staff
- Communicable diseases/infection control

- Clothing/footwear
- Biting
- Nutrition/culturally appropriate foods
- Safety — Building & Equipment Checks
- Fire & Emergency Procedures
- Smoking
- Death of a child
- Occupational Health & Safety
- Toys brought from home

Programming

- Daily programs & routines
- Behaviour management (discipline)
- Anti-bias
- Rest time
- Religious rituals, e.g. 'grace before meals'
- Excursions
- Promotion of Aboriginal Culture
- Children's Sexuality
- Multiculturalism
- Promotion of home language
- Children with 'special needs'
- Outdoor play
- 'Gifted' children
- Birthdays
- Time management & flexibility
- Gender equality
- Dealing with parent requests which are developmentally inappropriate

Staffing

- Interviewing staff
- Employment agreements/contracts
- Lunch breaks
- Orientation of new staff
- Leave without pay
- Permanent/casual/relief staff
- Professional development
- Communication between staff
- Communication between staff & parents
- Work experience students
- Children of staff members
- Dealing with inappropriate discipline by staff
- Disciplinary/grievance procedures
- Use of volunteers & unpaid staff
- Annual leave
- Phone calls
- Parent access to records

Administration

- Setting policies
- Management committee responsibilities
- Budget
- Regulations
- Fee payment
- Late fees
- Late collection of children
- Fund-raising
- Dealing with the media & publicity
- Public relations & advertising
- Ordering supplies & equipment
- After-hours access
- Child protection & child abuse
- Visitors

The number and type of policies you develop depends entirely upon your needs.

'Let's start with a policy on writing policies.'

When to make or revise policies

When you establish a centre

Policies towards fees, staffing, enrolment, health & safety, administration, and programming need to be considered and developed.

When problems occur

If a problem presents itself often enough in your centre, it is wise to have a policy to deal with it. It is important to keep in mind that, if a decision is made often enough, it can be seen as a policy — even if it is not written down.

During planning

Spend some time examining problems and challenges that constantly occur, as well as anticipating potential problems. Develop policies to deal with these and you'll be well prepared.

When changes happen

Often, over months or years, you may have a complete changeover of staff which can drastically change the 'culture' of your centre. The gradual turnover of children also means you are constantly dealing with different parents who bring with them varied beliefs, views, and priorities for their children. Your management committee may also change completely year after year.

It's essential that you take a good hard look at your policies now and then, to check if they are still relevant and working for you.

> *We recently decided to completely update our policies. We had a lot of new staff who were younger and really enthusiastic. We felt the existing policies were old-fashioned. (Participant)*

When ideas become outdated

Policies should be flexible and able to be updated in line with the advent of new laws, societal changes, issues, and information.

How to develop policies

The process of policy development can be very simple or very involved, depending upon how you approach it. There are some very important things to remember:

- Don't attempt it alone.
- Include many people in the process at every stage, especially parents.
- Everyone should agree with and understand a policy if they have to work with it.
- Policy writing is not a quick process — it can take months.

It is important that you don't call in an outside person to create your policies. They will know nothing about your needs, and the policies they write will probably be unworkable. If you do need help, find relief workers to release you and your staff from your daily routine now and then, so you can tackle your policy writing. If you can't afford that, think of other ways you can make some time available.

To start

It is important that you have a written mission statement and a philosophy, even in draft form, upon which to base your policies. Remember, policies are the tools that make your philosophy work.

Once we had written our philosophy and goals we asked ourselves 'what problems and challenges get in the way of us carrying out our goals?' Then we listed them and wrote draft policies to help address them.
(Participant)

Policy-making doesn't mean you have to be locked up in a conference room for hours, drawing ideas from thin air. You can adapt policies from other centres to fit your own, you can adapt your existing policies, or you can make policies starting from the beginning.

Policy-making doesn't mean you have to be locked up in a conference room for hours.

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Writing a policy

This flow chart shows the processes you may wish to go through to write a policy, in this case a *gender equity policy*. It shows you can start at the very beginning, adapt existing policies, or combine both approaches.

'Maybe now is a good time to start thinking about a superhero policy!'

Stage	Action
1. Examination	Any number of reasons may have prompted you to develop a gender equity policy for your service: an incident, a comment from a parent or staff member, a child's sexist behaviour, changes in society, a recent training course, or the accreditation process. Examine your service. Seek input from parents and staff asking yourselves the following questions: Why is such a policy needed?; What should be in it?; and How does it relate to our philosophy?
2. Research	Collecting information is vital. Investigate any guidelines (e.g. Accreditation) as well as legal considerations. You may already have a policy covering this area that you just need to update. Seek out policies on the same issue from other centres that you can adapt to suit your centre. Looking at other people's policies can also help you decide what things you *don't want* in your policy. You may organise inservice training on anti-bias and gender equality for staff and parents. You could also arrange home visits, a survey, or a dedicated suggestion box or graffiti board to determine how staff and parents feel about the issue.

Stage	Action
3. Discussion	Once you have all the information at hand, now is the time to 'brainstorm'. An effective way to brainstorm is with a policy subcommittee of about four people (parents, staff, management, committee member, etc.). Discuss the implications of developing the policy, how it will work, how staff and parents feel about the subject, what should be in it, or if an existing policy can be adapted. You may choose to adapt part of another policy and write the rest yourself.
4. Planning your draft	Once you have thoroughly investigated the issue — collected parent and staff input, studied legalities, and highlighted what you like and dislike about existing policies — decide if you want to write up a draft gender equity policy from scratch or adapt an existing policy. List everything which should be included in the policy. You may find that there are one or two laws to consider and certain principles in the accreditation system to take into account. Your research may have also told you that you need to include a definition and some background information. Check again if the policy relates to your philosophy.
5a. Adapting existing policy	Having gathered as many examples as you can, highlight the essential points and discuss which policies are easier to read, workable and relevant to your centre. List the main points and then 'flesh them out', checking that you are not being repetitive. You may need to rewrite the policy completely so the style works for your centre. If you intend copying other policies word for word, be sure they will work for you — and definitely gain permission from the original author.

Use a tape recorder in meetings instead of, or as well as, a person taking notes. Transcribe the tape later.
Staff and parents need as much background information as possible. Encourage them to read this book or other information before you all begin.

Stage	Action
5b. Writing policy from scratch	Your first draft doesn't have to be perfect. Writing is a process of shaping and discarding. If you find writing intimidating you may wish to go through all these steps: 1. Organise your information. 2. Look at what you like and dislike about other gender equity policies. 3. Write a plan based on your original objective — what you want the policy to achieve. 4. Start with key-words. 5. Write up the policy in point form — one topic or issue for each point. If necessary, form these points into paragraphs. 6. Remember your overall objective — check that the draft policy will help you to achieve your philosophy and mission statement.
6. Feedback	Circulate your draft policy amongst staff, parents, management committee members or colleagues from other centres, even work experience students. With the help of their comments and suggestions you may re-draft or rewrite your policy. Remember to date it: for example, Happy Happy Kids... *No Sexism Policy* effective from... 12/11/95
7. Put it in print	For policies to be effective, people involved in the service must know about them. Make them available to potential staff when they attend the interview, as well as to new staff, relief staff and volunteer workers, and new parents. All parents and existing staff should have access to them also, even if they weren't involved in their preparation. You may choose to present all your policies in a fancy printed book, a loose leaf-folder, on computer disk, as photocopied loose leaves, or as posters around your service. You may also need to have them translated into local community languages. See page 21 for a completed example of a *No Sexism Policy*.

Common questions & ideas from other centres

Which policies do we need?

You need only policies which are relevant to your centre. Refer back to page 10 for ideas. To find out which policies staff and parents think should exist in your service, you can try any of the following methods: meetings; a survey; a policy checklist; a dedicated suggestion box; a policy suggestion book on the front counter; or a graffiti board. You could also add 'policy development' to the agenda of all your regular staff and committee meetings as a regular point.

I heard of one centre that stuck up an old venetian blind on a wall with a big sign at the top calling for suggestions and ideas for policies. They provided thick texta pens, and staff, parents and visitors responded very well. They wrote their ideas and suggestions all over it like a colourful wall of graffiti. Everyone was able to add their suggestions, anonymously if desired, as well as responding to other people's comments. It was brilliant! (Participant)

Network with other centres, particularly centres who have a similar philosophy to yours, and find which policies they have developed. Be prepared to share your ideas with them too.

How many policies should we write?

The number of policies you develop will depend upon many things, including the size and requirements of your centre. If you were to write up 30 policies but only ever referred to 10 of them, you may have too many. On the other hand, you may find the other 20 will eventually come in handy. It's not as if you need to instantly develop a suite of policies. They should be developed, redrafted, and deleted as needs dictate. Be guided by the input you get from staff and parents.

Who should be involved?

As many people as possible. Policy writing should be a consultative process. Definitely involve parents, as they and their children are your clients. Staff should be involved, as they are the ones who put the policies into practice. Management and committee members will also have input, and help to guide the process. You may even choose to involve outside help — consultants, staff to relieve you, casual staff, work experience students, volunteers, community members, translators, and any other number of people.

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How do we present our policies and philosophy?

As one participant said, 'Policies are about what makes sense in a particular centre'. The same can be said for a philosophy or mission statement. Every centre will differ in the way it formulates and presents its philosophy and policies. For example the following (hypothetical) centres could have the following:

Money Pot Child Care

- A mission statement
- A philosophy
- 10 goals
- 45 policies
- 30 procedures
- Staff contracts

The mission statement is written in gold script and hung by the door in a gilt frame. Policies and procedures come in a professionally-designed loose-leaf folder or are available on computer disk for staff and parents. An edited version of all this information is presented in a glossy full-colour brochure.

Those involved: parents, staff, consultants, lawyers, child psychologists, graphic designers, and the management committee.

Happy Happy Kids

- A mission statement
- A philosophy
- 25 policies
- 10 procedures

All presented in a simple stapled book printed on recycled paper. The philosophy is handwritten on the wall and surrounded by a large mural, done with the children, in the foyer. Policies and philosophy are translated into three languages common in the local community.

Those involved: parents, staff, management committee, work experience students, interpreters, translators, and children.

26-hour Care Bears

- A philosophy
- 20 policies (including procedures)
- All are presented in photocopied loose leaf typed sheets, dated and readily available.
- Those involved: management committee, staff, parents, volunteers, part-time relief staff, and other centres.

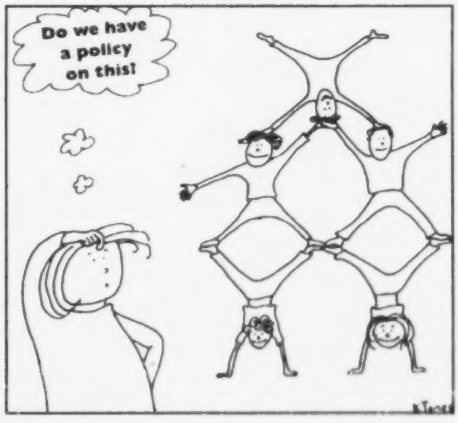
Conclusion

The accreditation process provides us with an ideal opportunity to lift the profile of the child care industry and improve conditions. Writing good policies for our centres and putting them into practice is an essential part of formalising what we do and achieving our goal of obtaining best practice. Searching through archives has shown that 60 years ago our industry did not even have written policies; yet retailers, unions, governments, and any manner of other professional organisations have been using policies and policy manuals for a century or more.

Policies also make life easier in the hectic world of a child care centre. They help decisions to be made quickly and professionally. They also empower staff and free up management.

Your philosophy and policies must be tailored to your centre. The process of developing a philosophy and policies is a consultative one and it may take months. Parents and staff must be involved.

Once you've prepared a policy or set of policies, the real test is not how professional they look on paper but how you put them into practice day to day. That is the key to best practice and excellence, which is, of course, what we are all striving for.



Be aware of different levels of literacy in the community. Not everyone is comfortable answering a questionnaire or survey. Be willing to talk through ideas and suggestions with parents and staff.

Appendix 1
Examples of policies

No sexism policy

Aim: To have a centre where children realise their full potential regardless of gender.

Explanation: 'Sexism' is a term used to describe a social system in which education, occupations, rewards, privileges, authority, responsibilities, benefits and disadvantages are, as a generality, allocated on the basis of sex and gender and frequently without regard to individual differences.

Implementation: The centre aims to develop and extend the talents of all the children regardless of sex, race, or social origin.

This is to happen on a number of levels.

1. Through the staff being aware of the way they treat individual children, in regard to language, attitudes, assumptions, and expectations.
2. Through the program presenting positive experiences for the children which are not based on sex role stereotypes.
3. Through positive role models. Staff are encouraged to take up non-traditional roles, for example: adult male staff 'nurturing' and adult female staff participating in 'traditionally male' activities. Female children are not over-protected and are encouraged to be more physically active and to use traditional 'boys' equipment. Conversely, a wider focus for boys is encouraged by the use of traditional 'girls' equipment.
4. By dividing tasks evenly between boys and girls.
5. By avoiding cliches such as 'strong, loud boys', 'pretty, quiet girls', and terms such as 'tomboy', 'sissy', etc.
6. By encouraging all children to express emotions and display affections (i.e. it's all right for boys to cry).
7. Through the use of resource materials which are not stereotypic.

Where possible, staff should reflect both sexes, and employment of men as Child Care workers will be encouraged.

Policy on contact with the media and publicity from the centre

Parent permission must be obtained by the authorised supervisor and/or staff members prior to photographs of children or the centre being taken by newspaper(s) or television/film crews.

Authorised supervisor/staff must never make public statements to any journalist or radio personnel without prior committee approval.

Space is available for parental permission or otherwise on the centre's enrolment form for child(ren) regarding video, photographs, interviews of children by media, visiting professionals, staff/carers, or students where any of the above will be for any form of display or publication.

Media Policy effective November 1995

Revised policy for custody disputes

Single, separated parents or guardians must show evidence of custody on enrolment, if there is a restriction of access to the child.

A copy of the custody paper must be kept by the teacher, together, if possible, with a photo of any person who *does not* have access to the child.

Effective May 1995

Policy for the implementation of a cross-cultural & anti-bias curriculum

The workers, parents and management of this centre endorse the concept of a cross-cultural and anti-bias curriculum, and believe that this perspective should be implemented throughout all centre programs.

To this end it is understood that:

- each worker undertakes to implement a cross-cultural, anti-bias perspective to the curriculum, and plans accordingly;
- the physical environment of the centre and its programs (including objectives, focus and direction, incidental learning opportunities, and group activities) reflect a commitment to this perspective;
- the program is recorded, so that parents and visiting groups can become aware of its objectives and implementation, and regularly assessed and evaluated against its objectives; and
- the program is developmentally-based and relevant to children's life experiences, interests, and social skills.

Stages of development in planning for a cross-cultural program will be:

- Observation of the community served by the centre, and identification of the socio-economic and cultural grouping of its families.
- Observation of the developmental and linguistic levels, and the interests and experience (with other cultural groups) of the children.
- Preparation of a culturally and experimentally broad learning environment which allows children to discover differences and similarities in readily apparent, concrete ways.
- Development of a broad cultural and anti-bias perspective — which challenges stereotyping and discriminatory behaviour and encourages peaceful, just and equitable cooperation — in all areas of the program.

It is hoped that children whose developing attitudes are influenced towards a positive view of diversity will acquire:

- an expanded awareness of others;
- a greater capacity to communicate;
- an increased willingness and ability to cooperate;
- a growing sense of social responsibility; and
- a high level of confidence and self-esteem.

Workers are selected for their qualifications and experience, but also, wherever possible, for their bi-culturalism and bi-lingualism.

Policy on Family Values

Aim: To have a centre where all families are treated equally, regardless of their composition, ideals, customs, and beliefs.

Explanation: Not all children belong to a traditional family, i.e. Mum, Dad, brothers and sisters. Not all families have the same living standards, religious beliefs, ideals, language, or opportunities.

Implementation:

1. Whatever the personal beliefs, ideas or customs of the staff, those of the parents must be respected and abided by.
2. If the values of the parent/child conflict with those of the centre (e.g. the acceptability of swearing at home) suggest that it may be appropriate at home, but not at the centre.
3. The child should not be disadvantaged or made to feel different because of the parents' beliefs.
4. We do not have the right to confuse children by inflicting our beliefs on them.
5. Recognise and accept non-traditional family structures (e.g. defacto, single parents, blended families, etc.) Help children to accept that there are many family structures and that each child belongs to a family.
6. Use resources which expose the children to a variety of family structures.
7. Be particularly aware of all the above when dealing with special days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc., and religious events such as Easter and Christmas. If you do celebrate these occasions, take into account that not all people do. Find out what other occasions are important to children and families in your service, and the wider community, and celebrate them as well.

Toiletting policy

effective January 1993

It must be made clear to parents and children at the time of enrolment that it is the policy of this centre that children are not allowed to relieve themselves in the centre grounds.

We recognise that this behaviour is acceptable and often very practical on the farm. But, due to hygiene, safety, and toilet training, this practice is not acceptable at the child care centre.

Staff should never embarrass a child or allow teasing to occur as they enforce this policy.

Multicultural policy

Australia is a society made up of people from many ethnic backgrounds. We must encourage and nurture our children's awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of other cultures. We can do this by integrating multiculturalism into our service.

Our programming must actively counter negative behaviours and stereotyping that can lead to racism. We must also ensure that discriminatory images of particular cultures are not promoted consciously or by accident through our activities.

Our environment must include a variety of books, music, clothing, crafts, posters, games, displays, and songs that reflect diversity in culture.

Staff are encouraged to attend inservice training on multicultural programming for centres.

The cultural backgrounds of staff should reflect the community in which the centre is located, at the very least. Staff will be recruited based upon qualifications, experience, and, where possible, a bi-cultural and bi-lingual background. Even if the local community if mainly Anglo-Australian, children and staff alike benefit from the knowledge and diversity that workers from a variety of cultural backgrounds can share.

Multicultural principles for children's services

1. Multiculturalism is the right of all people to have equal opportunity for access to society's resources; and the need for recognition and understanding of their diverse languages, cultures, religious practices, and values.
2. All services should be accessible and appropriate to children of non-English speaking backgrounds. Recognition, support, and opportunity should be given to ensure:
   - the right of all children to maintain their language and culture;
   - the need to acknowledge different religious and cultural practices;
   - the right of all children to benefit from good quality educational programs that take into account the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity of the community at large; and
   - the provision of relevant and appropriate programs and activities which will ensure that each child's cultural heritage is respected.
3. A program with a multicultural perspective acknowledges and supports the linguistic, cultural, and religious needs of all children.
4. Children bring specific knowledge and skills to the learning situation through membership of a particular cultural group.
5. The implementation of such opportunity is afforded through the provision of:
   - adequate and appropriate food and drinks available to children according to their cultural needs;
   - the employment of bilingual staff enables and encourages the participation of both parents and children in the service; and
   - sensitivity to cultural, linguistic and religious factors to ensure that each child is accorded its right and that the needs of both parents and children are preserved.

Folk songs, stories, art, and crafts are only the beginnings of any genuinely multicultural program. The development of cultural recognition and affirmation of the child requires that service personnel develop the knowledge, awareness and sensitivity of cultural differences in order to provide the necessary experiences for all children attending the service.

Policy on Aboriginal awareness and culture

Aim: To have a centre which provides children with access to information and appreciation of Aboriginal culture.

Explanation: Australian society has had much misinformation about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander (indigenous) people and their culture. This misinformation has led to violence against indigenous people and a continuation of discrimination. The centre will attempt to present all children and their families with a positive appreciation of Aboriginal cultures as they exist in Australia today.

Implementation:

- Through books, music, crafts, singing, posters, dance, etc., but it must not end there. The program in the centre should reflect an attitude of respect for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. It is important that the depiction of Aboriginal people in our books, games resources, etc., is not limited to traditional/tribal/celebrational images, although these are very important. It is just important for children to see images of Aboriginal people in a modern context.
- It is important that staff and non-Aboriginal parents understand correct information about Aboriginal society. Such information can be gained by talking to local Aboriginal people and community organisations, through Aboriginal educational organisation and consultants (such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, AECG in NSW), and approved TAFE courses and reading material.
- Staff from Aboriginal backgrounds will be employed wherever possible.
- Where Aboriginal children attend the centre, their parents or guardians will be invited to give advice to the staff about culturally appropriate programs. We also actively encourage Aboriginal parents to join our management committee.

Footwear policy

Thongs, gumboots, and slippers are not allowed. Children must wear shoes and socks at all times. Bare feet are acceptable at rest time. Sandals with buckles are permitted in warmer weather.

Appendix 2
Examples of philosophies

Example #1

Philosophy adapted from Fairfield City Council, Child Care Unit, Canley Vale.

- Every child is an individual who brings to the centre a specific cultural identity. This is the point from which learning begins.
- Every child has the right to have an environment which extends their home experiences.
- Children have a right to be cared for in an environment where the parents are welcome and respected, no matter how they look, dress, or speak.
- Learning is most effective in the child's first language. Therefore maintenance and extension of the child's first language is essential.
- Language is not learned in isolation, but is closely linked to the child's development in all areas — intellectual, physical, and social.
- Learning concepts in first language make learning a second language easier, and earlier learning of a second language encourages flexibility in children's thought processes.
- Learning is most effective when activities combine child interests and bridge former experiences.
- Children need to have a positive self-concept. Self-concept and language are linked by accepting the child and showing that you value that child as a person.
- All people have common needs, feelings and relationships, even though they may look, dress, and speak in different ways.
- The centre will adopt a child-centred approach that uses ongoing observational records for planning activities and learning environments.
- Children should be cared for in a home-like environment, where they can be with children of all ages.
- Parents are the most important people in their child's life and should be involved as much as possible in making decisions about their child's day.

Example #2

Developed in conjunction with the Murawina Mount Druitt Resource Unit, NSW MACS Services as well as the New South Wales Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education Policy.

Aims and Objectives

This centre was established to provide access to child care for Aboriginal children within the Illawarra region. Some of the aims and objectives are set out below:

1. Programs should be of a high quality, culturally diverse, and take account of special needs.
2. Aboriginal children's needs should be met though programs which foster physical, emotional, learning, and cultural development.
3. The differing needs of Aboriginal families in inner metropolitan, outer metropolitan, rural, and remote areas should be recognised. We should be flexible enough to meet a variety of community needs.
4. Aboriginal families should have access to a diverse range of integrated and flexible children's services to meet the needs of Aboriginal families and children. This should be achieved through the coordination of government and non-government services to maximise the use of existing resources and provide a range of service options.
5. Programs offered in Aboriginal children's services should be age-appropriate and should seek to enhance the competency levels of Aboriginal children.
6. Aboriginal families should have access to quality children's services which are affordable and efficiently managed.
7. Aboriginal children's services should be appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal children with special needs.
8. Services should meet the range of needs in the Aboriginal community, including children with disabilities and children and families with a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
9. Quality care should be provided to Aboriginal children through the employment of appropriately trained and skilled staff (Aboriginality to be recognised as a qualification in itself) and provision of adequate equipment appropriate to meet the developmental needs of children.
10. This service is provided to prepare children for school to create a state of readiness so that they will have the best chance of survival in a mainstream school environment, in which Aboriginal children have historically been disadvantaged and have not coped at all well.
11. Since children attending a MACS centre are largely from a disadvantaged background, extra steps need to be taken to develop positive self-esteem, independence, and responsibility; and this is accomplished, at least in part, by

Continued...

engaging a firm sense of Aboriginal identity and pride in their heritage.

12. The introduction of the Aboriginal student support and parent awareness program should be commended as being an appropriate recognition of the need for the participation of Aboriginal people at a local level in the delivery of school programs.
13. The success of programs is dependent on the extent to which the Aboriginal community is guaranteed adequate consultation, negotiation and support in devising and implementing cultural educational programs.
14. The primary focus of the Aboriginal worker is to develop an ongoing program suitable to the needs of Aboriginal children.
15. Parents should be involved in developing programs, including involvement in management.
16. Children, parents, and community people should be helped to recognise the specific characteristics of local Aboriginal culture, family networks, kinship, language, art, and religious and spiritual beliefs.
17. When engaging local Aboriginal people to assist in the preparation and delivery of such courses at a local level, school principals, and the relevant education department should accept and recognise the expertise these people would bring to such programs.

Developed in conjunction with the New South Wales Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education Policy

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Farmer, S. (1995) *Policy Development in Early Childhood Services.* Sydney: Community Child Care.

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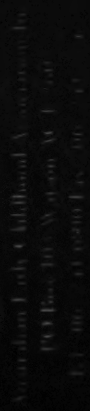

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